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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

On Being and Bonaventure: a Franciscan ontological argument

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Abstract

Scholastic and analytic philosophers have often criticized those Medieval ontological arguments which were inspired by Anselm's *Proslogion*. Notably, Thomas Aquinas famously rejected contemporary ontological arguments on the grounds that they are committed to the mistaken thesis that God's existence is self-evident. For Aquinas, the proposition "God exists" can only be self-evident to those who grasp God's essence, yet we cannot possess such knowledge in this life. Meanwhile, analytic philosophers emphasize another criticism which was also anticipated by Aquinas: the charge that valid classical ontological arguments are question-begging, since they assume at the outset that some relevant description of God has an extramental referent. In this paper, we suggest that Scholastic ontological arguments may be more persuasive than critics allow. In particular, we seek to revive Bonaventure's ontological argument for God's existence outlined in *Journey of the Mind to God*, Chapter V. Having provided a concise formulation of the argument, we consider the motivation for each premise, drawing on Brian Leftow's work on Ordinary Sensory Imagination and Kris McDaniel's account of the analogy of being. We argue that since Bonaventure's argument is consistent with a strong doctrine of divine ineffability, it is well placed to avoid Aquinas' criticisms. Equally, Bonaventure's background metaphysical commitments and epistemology of being afford him a way of arguing that his preferred description of God has an extramental referent. Although Bonaventure's argument may be criticized at various stages, we conclude that it deserves further attention from Thomists and analytic philosophers alike.

Keywords Ontological argument · Bonaventure · Aquinas · Being

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Introduction

Perhaps one reason for the ongoing philosophical interest in ontological arguments is that, according to some classical proponents of the latter, they perform two miraculous tasks. First, they attempt to demonstrate God's existence from premises which are *prima facie* uncontroversial, and perhaps even knowable a priori. Second, they appear (if successful) to establish God's existence beyond rational doubt. Unfortunately, just as many contemporary philosophers reject the possibility of miraculous events, so too they regard ontological arguments as impotent. The current philosophical consensus, despite occasional protests to the contrary, is that ontological arguments are at best dialectically ineffective. At worst, they are either invalid or else rest on a highly dubious (e.g., Meinongian) metaphysics.[1]

In this paper, we seek to revive one ontological argument developed by Bonaventure in his work *The Journey of the Mind to God*, and to show how it may afford responses to some central concerns which both Scholastic and modern philosophers have about ontological arguments in general. Since Bonaventure was himself a Scholastic philosopher, we will examine the effectiveness of his argument by considering the work of his direct contemporary Thomas Aquinas, who directly challenged arguments developed by Bonaventure and other Franciscan contemporaries. In our view, Aquinas perceptively raises important difficulties for these arguments in a Scholastic context. However, for the benefit of modern audiences, we will also seek to put Bonaventure's argument into conversation with contemporary analytic literature.

Without giving an unqualified defense of Bonaventure's argument, we argue that those who are broadly committed to Thomistic metaphysics should take Bonaventure's argument seriously. We likewise suggest that analytic philosophers should pay further attention to his argument. To this end, we will first lay out some objections to ontological arguments levelled by both Aquinas and analytic philosophers, before introducing Bonaventure's own argument from the *Journey*. We will then show how Bonaventure's argument is particularly well-placed to respond to these concerns.

Aquinas' objections to ontological arguments

Thomas Aquinas disputes the success of ontological arguments at various points in his *corpus*.[2] Central to Aquinas' dismissal of these arguments is his assumption that they are committed to the thesis that God's existence is self-evident. Thomas, by contrast, judges that the proposition 'God exists' cannot be self-evident. Why so? He explains that the only way a proposition can be self-evident is if it applies some predicate to a subject, and 'the predicate is included in the essence of the subject'

[1] For this framing, see Van Inwagen (2012); for similar perspectives see Oppy (1995) and Goldschmidt (2020). For an overview of negative judgments about the efficacy of classical and modern ontological arguments, see Stacey (2021, 434–446).

[2] See, amongst other places, *Commentary on the Sentences* I, d. 3, q. 2, a. 1; *De Veritate* q. 10, a. 12; *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book I, 10–11; *Summa Theologiae* Ia.2.1. For discussion of Aquinas on ontological arguments, see Logan (2009, 138–143) and Leftow (2018).

(Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.2.1, *resp*.).[3] For Aquinas, this is impossible when it comes to the proposition 'God exists', since we cannot understand God's essence (i.e., the real definition of God) in this life. Knowing God's essence is itself impossible, according to Aquinas, because of his broader epistemology. Thomas holds that all our knowledge is ultimately derived from sense-experience, via abstraction. Since effects fall short of the perfection of their causes, whilst we can abstract concepts from our experience of creatures and apply them to the first cause (God), this application will always be by way of analogy: those concepts will always be pale imitations which fail to capture God's infinite yet perfectly simple reality.

Some readers might find this objection to ontological arguments rather strange. After all, Anselm's *Proslogion* explicitly acknowledges our inability to fully comprehend God in this life, and so Anselm characterizes God in negative terms as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'.[4] Equally, modern modal ontological arguments do not typically claim that God's existence is an analytic truth given our knowledge of God's nature. Rather, they characterize God as perfect or maximally great, without necessarily assuming that we can arrive at a real definition of God's nature. Thus, for instance, Plantinga describes God as a being who possesses 'maximal greatness', which entails the properties of necessary existence, omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection (see Plantinga, 1977, pp. 106 −108). Whilst Plantinga is perhaps more optimistic than Aquinas that we can describe what God is in positive terms, he nowhere claims that we have an exhaustive understanding of God's nature, or that the phrase 'maximally great being' gives us such knowledge. To show that God exists, proponents of modal ontological arguments rely on the further claim– which is a substantive assertion not inferred from any characterization of God– that God possibly exists. However, as will become clear below, some of Aquinas' Franciscan contemporaries do suggest that we should infer God's necessary existence from what we know about His nature. If one interprets these arguments as maintaining that we have a comprehensive understanding of the divine nature, Aquinas' objection will tell against them.

The second objection to classical ontological arguments raised by Aquinas should be more familiar to modern philosophers, because it was later articulated by Caterus (Descartes, 1931, 7–8) and Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A595/B623), and latterly endorsed by Plantinga whom it inspired to develop his influential 'modal' alternative to Anselm's argument (Plantinga, 1977, 101–104). Put simply, this objection states that ontological arguments are either invalid or unpersuasive. If they begin with premises which do not entail the real-world existence of God (defined as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', *vel sim*.), then they cannot conclude that God exists other than as an object of human thought. But by contrast, if they assume the real-world existence of God at the outset, naturally 'beg the question', since one cannot reasonably embrace their key premise unless one already accepts their conclusion.

[3] Translations from *Summa Theologiae* are taken from Aquinas (1922-1935).

[4] Thus, in *Proslogion* 1, Anselm explains that he is not trying 'to attain [God's] lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it' (Anselm, 1998, 87).

Aquinas neatly articulates this point, with reference to Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II, in *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book 1 Chap. 11:

> [F]rom the fact that that which is indicated by the name God is conceived by the mind, it does not follow that God exists save only in the intellect. Hence, that than which a greater cannot be thought will likewise not have to exist save only in the intellect. From this it does not follow that there exists in reality something than which a greater cannot be thought. No difficulty, consequently, befalls anyone who posits that God does not exist. For that something greater can be thought than anything given in reality or in the intellect is a difficulty only to him who admits that there is something than which a greater cannot be thought in reality.'[5]

Making this clearer for analytic audiences, Graham Oppy uses the language of 'intensional' and 'extensional' operators (Oppy, 1995, 115–118; 2006, 51–52). Non-theists, of course, should not accept any premises of ontological arguments which feature terms which entail God's extra-mental existence. Equally, they should not accept such premises if they are embedded in 'extensional' operators (e.g., 'in truth…'), which commit one who accepts them to the existence of the entities described in embedded expressions. Non-theists should only accept premises involving terms which refer to God if they are embedded in 'intensional' operators (e.g., 'as the story goes'; '*ex hypothesi*') which vitiate any ontological commitments of the terms they contain. However, from premises about God embedded in intensional operators, one can only infer conclusions which are likewise embedded. For instance, if one begins with the premise '*According to the typical definition*, God is that than which nothing greater can be thought', one can at most reach the conclusion that '*According to the typical definition*, God exists'. What proponents of ontological arguments seek are conclusions concerning God's existence that are not embedded in intensional operators. But, charges Oppy, non-theists should not embrace premises which yield those conclusions.

Bonaventure's ontological argument(s)

In Question 1, Article 1 of his *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Bonaventure is explicit that belief in God is innate and rationally indubitable.[6] Bonaventure gives more than two dozen arguments throughout chapter one of this volume to establish these theses. Before articulating them, he lists some sufficient

[5] As translated in Aquinas (1975).

[6] We here draw on the translation in Bonaventure (1979, 107–121). Cullen (2006, 63) neatly summarizes Bonaventure's position: 'Bonaventure believes the human mind innately knows that God exists: "Indeed, it is certain as far as the knower is concerned, for the knowledge of this truth is innate to the rational mind in as far as it possesses the nature of an image" [Bonaventure, 1882-1902, Vol. 5, 49]. He explains that since the mind is an image, it has an innate knowledge and memory of that of which it is an image, as well as an innate desire for union with this original. By this, Bonaventure does not mean that every human being has a clear knowledge of God. He is speaking objectively.'

conditions for a truth to be indubitable, which are germane to his analysis: (1) Every truth that is impressed in all minds is an indubitable truth; (2) every truth proclaimed by all creatures is an indubitable truth; and (3) every truth, which in itself is most certain and most evident, is an indubitable truth (Bonaventure, 1979, p. 107). Bonaventure then gives a plethora of arguments to show that 'God exists' is beyond rational doubt in each of these respects.

Zachary Hayes neatly summarizes paragraphs 11–20, which provide ten reasons to hold that God's existence is a truth 'proclaimed by all creatures':

> 'So crucial is the concept of being, that one cannot even affirm the non-existence of anything without moving through the positive concept of being. Being, therefore, is prior to all else and is that by which we know all else. But this must be being as first, absolute, and unlimited, it must be pure being. But such being is never found as an object of knowledge in the world. […] Thus, as non-being can be known only through being, and as privations can be known only through positive qualities, so every form of limitation must be reduced to the positive attribute which is necessarily prior. Here is the core of the arguments presented by Bonaventure; all ten reflect the same structure. […] Since all creatures manifest the limits pointed out here, they all manifest the existence of God as the necessary, absolute, perfect, prior being.' (Bonaventure, 1979, p. 72).

As J. Isaac Goff puts it, 'These arguments, Bonaventure concludes, show how all creatures 'cry out' the truth of the Divine Being. Since all creatures singly and together make this claim, the divine being is a truth that cannot be doubted' (Goff, 2015, 210–211).

Bonaventure's arguments from paragraphs 11–20 can collectively be interpreted as an endorsement of the view that knowledge of 'pure Being' itself is a precondition to our knowledge about everything thing else. And for Bonaventure, 'pure Being' is just divine being. But precisely how does Bonaventure motivate these claims, and what do they have to do with 'ontological arguments' such as those offered by Anselm, Descartes, or Plantinga? To see this, we turn to a passage from Chapter V of Bonaventure's *The Journey of the Mind to God*:

> 'He, therefore, who wishes to contemplate the invisible things of God in relation to the unity of His essence should fix the attention of his soul on Being Itself and see that Being Itself is so absolutely certain that it cannot be thought not to be, because the most pure Being Itself does not come to our mind except with the full flight of non-being, in the same way as absolute nothing does not come to our mind except with the full flight of being.[7] Just as, therefore, complete nothingness contains nothing of being or of its attributes, so contrariwise,

[7] Latin: '*quia ipsum esse purissimum non occurit nisi in plena fuga non-esse*, *sicut et nihil in plena fuga esse'*. (Bonaventure, 1882-1902, Vol. 5, 308). Perhaps this clause is better translated as, 'because the most pure Being Itself does not come to our mind except in full flight from non-being, in the same way absolute nothing does not come to our mind except in full flight from being'. Bonaventure's point appears to be that there is no commonality between 'pure Being' and 'absolute nothing', even though he will later argue that the latter can only be understood in relation to the former.

> being itself contains nothing of non-being, either in act or in potency, in objective truth or in our estimate of it. But since non-being is the privation of being, it does not come into the intellect except by way of being. Being, however, does not come to us by means of something else, because everything that is grasped by the intellect is grasped either as non-being, or as being in potency, or as being in act.
>
> If, therefore, non-being cannot be grasped except through being, and if being in potency cannot be understood except through being in actuality, and if being designates the pure actuality of being, then being is that which first comes into the intellect, and this being is that which is pure act. But this being is not a particular being which is a limited being, since any such particular being is mixed with potentiality. Neither is it analogous being, for that has the least actuality, since it least exists. It remains, therefore, that the being which we are considering is the Divine Being.' (*Journey* V.3; Bonaventure, 1993, 28–29).

But granting that one cannot even think of non-being without reference to Divine Being, what ramifications does this have for the question of God's existence? Bonaventure appears to further argue that since Divine Being is first in the conceptual order, it also has metaphysical priority over all other beings and enjoys perfect (presumably, necessary) existence:

> 'You will find that [this most pure Being] cannot be thought of as a being attained through something else. Hence it must necessarily be thought of as absolutely first, and it cannot come into existence from nothing or from something else. […] It appears to you as having nothing of possibility, since every possible being has in some way something of non-being, and hence it is supremely and in the highest degree actual.' (*Journey* V.5; Bonaventure, 1993, 29–30).

Indeed, it further follows that God's existence is indubitable:

> 'If "God" is the name of the being that is first, eternal, most simple, most actual, and most perfect, such a being cannot be thought not to be…' (*Journey* V.6; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 30).

Bonaventure's discussion is a little hard to follow. It's not clear how he here intends his contention that divine Being is the first object of the intellect to support his eventual conclusion that God's existence is indubitable. However, affording ourselves some interpretative license, we glean the following argument from *Journey* V:

> (1) We can comprehensively describe reality through the concepts of non-being, being in potency, and being in act.
>
> (2) Non-being can only be understood by way of grasping being.

(3) Being in potency can only be grasped by way of grasping being in act, and ultimately Being Itself.

(4) Being Itself is pure act.

So,

(5) Grasping Being Itself (i.e., pure act) is a necessary precondition for understanding non-being and all other forms of being.

So,

(6) Being exists (extra-mentally) *a se*; indeed, its existence is indubitable.

To understand Bonaventure, it's important to grasp his way of thinking about 'being'. Bonaventure would follow Aristotle in affirming that 'being is said in many ways' (*Metaphysics*, Γ.2). For Medieval Aristotelians, there are many different senses (or, kinds) of 'being' (see Feser, 2014, pp. 256–263). Notably, there is being in act (i.e., those things which presently exist and the properties they currently possess) and being in potency (i.e., the properties which those things could come to possess). Equally, amongst actual beings, some have existence intrinsically (substances) and others exist only 'in' the former, as their properties (accidents). Lastly, many Scholastics affirmed that there is a fundamental distinction between God, who exists entirely *a se* and somehow possess all perfections as a perfectly simple reality, and creatures who can only exhibit a limited degree of perfection and who necessarily depend on God's causal influence for their existence.

Assuming this broadly Aristotelian metaphysics, (1) exhaustively catalogues reality. When we analyse the world in terms of being, we discover actual being, potential being, and non-being (i.e., absences or privations; the latter were sometimes dubbed 'beings of reason' by Scholastics). So according to Bonaventure, one cannot understand any aspect of reality (i.e., being and non-being) without reference to Being Itself (i.e., God).

But is this position plausible? Let's work backwards from non-being to Being itself. Can one understand non-being without already having a concept of being? Non-being is defined in light of the concept of being. Without the concept of being, there is nothing to negate.

This contention that we can't conceive of nothing without something is central to Bonaventure's argument. It underlies his subsequent claim that, more generally, we need to understand 'pure Being' to understand potential or actual being. Brian Leftow's recent work on ordinary sensory imagination can be used to support Bonaventure's claim. Ordinary Sensory Imagination (OSI) is how we ordinarily present to ourselves a way in which the world might be (Leftow, 2022, p. 158). This is often done through a visual field, which we project in our imagination like a cinema screen. Leftow suggests that we can use OSI to make modal judgements. Suppose that Evangeline wonders whether unicorns are possible. Utilizing OSI, she might project in her mind, as if on a cinema screen, the image of a horse with a horn. If

Evangeline can imagine a unicorn in this way, she will be inclined to think that unicorns are possible beings.

Leftow urges his readers to imagine 'nothing' utilizing OSI. It simply can't be done. Take away the unicorn and the grass on which it lies. What is Evangeline now imagining? Likely, she has imagined a blank screen or perhaps a darkened space (Leftow, 2022, 160–1). In order to imagine nothing, one must still imagine something (i.e., an empty screen or space). That is, one is left trying to imagine or conceive of nothing through something which possesses being. While Leftow makes these points in order to stave off an objection to Anselm's ontological argument, we think his analysis of OSI supports (2).

Returning to Bonaventure's own analysis, consider (3). Can one understand being in potency without the concept of being in act? Apparently not: when some entity has potential being (say, a pot has the potential to be heated), we mean that an *actual* entity has the capacity to acquire some degree of *actual* being (e.g., to become actually hot). Equally, when we turn to actual beings, one cannot understand accidents without an appreciation of substances. This is because, on the typical Scholastic view, accidents by definition only exist *in* substances, whereas the latter do not exist in anything beyond themselves. So, given Bonaventure's underlying metaphysics, it seems right to conclude that one can only understand non-being with reference to substance.

But shouldn't an Aristotelian epistemology of being be grounded in merely the generic concept of substance– i.e., that which exists in itself -- rather than Being Itself, if the latter is understood as divine being? After all, in *Metaphysics* Γ.2, Aristotle himself suggests that the various senses of 'being' are united by their reference to substance. We suggest that Bonaventure holds to what we call a *paradigm theory* of being. According to a paradigm theory of some property, entities possess that property insofar as they appropriately resemble some entity which serves as the standard for possession of that property. To recognize that an entity possesses the property is to perceive that resemblance. In this way, for instance, things possess the property of 'being a meter in length' insofar as they are as long as the original meter rule. As Bonaventure sees it, God is the paradigm case of being: things exist inasmuch as they resemble Him. So, to understand that a substance exists, one must appreciate its relationship to God.

Yet is there any reason for those who accept a broadly Scholastic Aristotelian ontology to affirm Bonaventure's paradigm theory of existence? Like many Medieval Aristotelians, Bonaventure believes that 'being' is extensionally equivalent to the transcendental features of 'unity', 'truth', and 'goodness' which characterize all things (see Aertsen, 2012, 13–27). Things exist to the extent to which they possess unity, truth and goodness. And, since these properties come in degrees, it is unsurprising that Bonaventure likewise thinks of being as a degreed property. God, who is 'most pure, most complete, and absolute Being' (*Journey* III.3; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 19), possesses being to the fullest degree.

Yet if one accepts Bonaventure's understanding of being and the transcendentals sketched in the previous paragraph, we claim it is plausible that one can't know what a particular substance is -- or indeed, understand the generic concept 'substance' -- unless one grasps the concepts of oneness, truth, and goodness as applied to being. Indeed, Bonaventure affirms that 'being per se cannot be known unless it is known

together with its properties, which are one, true, and good' (Ibid., 19). However, a substance *qua* substance does not possess these properties to a perfect degree, since something can be a substance without being perfectly one, true, and good. Any created substance, on the Scholastic view, is composite, likely mutable, and lacks God's perfection. On the other hand, God, who is entirely simple, *just is* (pure) being, and thus is perfectly one, true, and good. But one cannot grasp divine 'being' simply with reference to 'substance', since the latter concept includes no reference to God's distinctive perfection.

It follows that the concept 'substance' does not by itself allow us to (completely) grasp what it is for God to count as a 'being' and consequently, 'substance' does not disclose the broadest meaning of 'being'. Understanding 'substance' does not itself, therefore, perfectly clarify what it means for something to exist.

But since substances are by definition beings (things which exist), any illuminating account of substance must include reference to some concept which clarifies what it is for an entity to 'exist' or to count as a 'being'. In similar vein, Bonaventure contends that 'unless one knows what being per se is, he cannot fully know the definition of any particular substance' (Bonaventure, Ibid.). Here, we can see what makes the paradigm theory attractive. It neatly explains how we have a concept through which we understand, to some degree, the whole range of being and so what it means to exist. On the paradigm theory, we have some knowledge of the concept 'Pure Being' (i.e., God), and we understand that all things exist insofar as they resemble Him. In other words, the paradigm theory affords an attractive explanation of how one can understand the full range of being and non-being, which is the sort of knowledge which Bonaventure is concerned to explain in *Journey* V.

We appreciate, of course, that we have not provided analytic readers with any defense of the underlying Aristotelian/Scholastic ontology on which Bonaventure's analysis rests. But we hope that we have helped to make his argument somewhat intelligible, and we draw the reader's attention to sophisticated recent defenses of similar ontologies aimed at analytic audiences, such as Miller (2002) and Zoll (2022).

Bonaventure's metaphysics of existence and analytic philosophy

Unfortunately for our purposes, most analytic philosophers reject the Aristotelian/Scholastic metaphysics which underlies Bonaventure's argument. For instance, many embrace Quine's view that the meaning 'being' or 'existence' is to be understood in terms of the existential quantifier (i.e., the first-order quantifier which quantifies over all and only existent objects). If for some object to exist is simply for it to fall under the existential quantifier, then one might hold that existence is univocal and doesn't come in degrees: substances and properties or God and His creatures, if there are any such entities, 'exist' in precisely the same sense, no matter how different they are from one another.[8] If so, is there any reason for analytic proponents of this view to hold that there are different kinds or degrees of being, let alone to embrace (5)? We tentatively suggest that analytic philosophers may have some reason to consider (5)

[8] For a similar argument from Peter van Inwagen, see McDaniel (2017, 22).

-- or at least some similar view -- plausible, even if they reject Bonaventure's own view of existence.

Kris McDaniel has recently defended the claim that even if 'existence' is understood in terms of quantification, there may still be levels or degrees of existence (McDaniel, 2010, 2017). One way to understand this is in terms of *naturalness* (McDaniel, 2010, p. 691; 2017, 27–8). Natural properties, such as greenness or blueness, describe the fundamental ways in which things exist, 'cutting reality at its joints' unlike putative time-indexed properties such as 'bleenness' or disjunctive properties such as 'being either abstract or Nixon's attorney'. Arguably, this is still the case if, as nominalists hold, there are strictly no such (extramental) entities as properties. Roughly, nominalists can recognize that some words or concepts more neatly capture the fundamental differences and similarities between entities than others. In this vein, some quantifiers might be more natural than others (thus Heidegger, according to McDaniel (2010, 692)). One might think, for example, that it is more natural to quantify over cookies than over cookies and fictional characters, because baked goods have little in common with imaginary persons.

McDaniel builds upon this thought to posit 'restricted quantifiers'. These are quantifiers which 'in virtue of [their] meaning, [range] over only some of what there is' (McDaniel, 2010, p. 692). Some of these quantifiers may be semantically primitive: they are not 'defined by way of the unrestricted quantifier and a restricting predicate' (McDaniel, Ibid.). We can use restricted quantifiers to capture the notion that some entities have a greater degree of existence than others. That is, 'the degree of being of an object is proportionate to the naturalness of the most natural quantifier that ranges over that object' (McDaniel, 2017, p. 169). Thus, an entity which falls under a perfectly natural quantifier exists to the fullest degree.

We think that if there are semantically primitive restricted quantifiers, one of them might plausibly range over only and all divine beings, as Bonaventure understands them. And this quantifier would be perfectly natural. Why so? Simply because God is, as Bonaventure himself intimates, fundamentally different from all other entities. As noted previously, Bonaventure understands God as a uniquely perfect and necessary being which exists entirely *a se*. Since God is to some extent intelligible yet wholly unique, if God exists, He (alone) falls under a quantifier which only ranges over divine beings.[9] Such a quantifier would neatly capture the vast gulf which separates God from all other objects which fall under the existential quantifier.[10]

McDaniel provides a way of thinking that there are 'degrees' of existence without embracing Bonaventure's own understanding of the nature of being. And if Bonaventure's God exists, He plausibly exists with a perfect degree of existence. But why hold, on this metaphysics, that one can one only understand either 'existence' in general if one has some knowledge of God?

[9] If God does not exist, it remains true that there is such a quantifier which (*per impossibile*) He *would* have fallen under, were He to have existed. Here, we write as though God does exist simply for ease of exposition.

[10] Proponents of apophatic theology might insist that God doesn't fall under *any* quantifier. If so, they can reasonably reject what follows.

Consider the existential quantifier. According to McDaniel, this is just the unrestricted quantifier: it ranges over all things. It follows that all semantically restricted primitive quantifiers '[range] over only some proper subset of that which the unrestricted quantifier ranges' (McDaniel, 2017, p. 24). Suppose that semantically restricted primitive quantifiers are *more* natural than the unrestricted quantifier. We might be tempted to hold this because, amongst other things, the range of objects which fall under the existential quantifier is highly diverse. In that case, perhaps, the unrestricted quantifier should be understood as ranging over the disjunction of more natural restricted quantifiers.[11] In that case, to understand the unrestricted quantifier, one must understand the non-disjunctive quantifiers ('modes of being') which are its disjuncts. A comprehensive understanding of the unrestricted quantifier would involve knowledge of the fundamental (i.e., perfectly natural) restricted quantifiers. Thus, if there is a perfectly natural quantifier which expresses God's mode of existence, then to understand the unrestricted quantifier, one must understand (*inter alia*) the restricted quantifier which ranges over all and only divine beings.

Whilst our proposal indicates a way to argue that knowledge of divine being is required for the understanding of 'existence', it is some way from Bonaventure's view that one can only understand non-divine modes of being (or non-being) in relation to divine being. Maybe one could defend something closer to Bonaventure's view by suggesting that besides the quantifier which ranges over divine beings, no other quantifiers are semantically primitive in the sense that they can be understood without reference to other, more fundamental quantifiers. Perhaps, for instance, it is essential to their definition that they only range over non-divine beings. But we will not attempt this task here. In short, therefore, it is not obvious that something like Bonaventure's argument in *Journey* V is hopeless if one rejects his own Scholastic/Aristotelian understanding of being. Nonetheless, Bonaventure's formulation of the argument (as we have parsed it) clearly assumes the latter, and the rest of our discussion will grant its plausibility.

The *Journey*'s argument and ontological arguments

One might wonder whether Bonaventure's argument in *Journey* V should be classified as an ontological argument, because it may not immediately remind readers of Anselm's arguments in *Proslogion* II and III or of various influential 'ontological' arguments offered by subsequent philosophers (e.g., Descartes, Gödel, or Plantinga). Whilst Bonaventure's argument remains interesting even if it doesn't count as an 'ontological' proof, we should explain why we think that it is helpful to classify it as

[11] McDaniel himself suggests that 'existence' may be an analogous property or quantifier, such that it isn't a 'mere disjunction'. However, he is rather vague about his understanding of what it takes for a property or quantifier to be 'analogous'. He holds that, '[m]ere disjunctions and analogous properties are always less natural than their disjuncts or analogue-instances. But disjunctive properties are far less natural than their disjuncts, whereas analogous properties can be almost as natural as their analogue-instances.' (McDaniel, 2010, p. 696). It is tempting to hold, then, that analogous properties (or quantifiers) are indeed disjuncts on his view, albeit of an unusual natural kind. If so, our analysis above holds whether 'existence' is a simply disjunctive or analogous quantifier.

such, in order to justify our consideration of objections to Anselmian arguments as challenges to this argument of Bonaventure.

This task is made more difficult by the fact that modern philosophers of religion do not agree on a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which an argument must meet in order to be considered an 'ontological argument'. For instance, Graham Oppy notes that whilst Kant believed that ontological arguments proceed from truths which are knowable a priori, 'it is not clear that any of the well-known arguments 'proceed completely a priori, from mere concepts' (Oppy, 2018, p. 9). Rather, he suggests that ontological arguments are those which evince 'the right kind of connection to Anselm's argument' (Ibid., 11). Oppy takes this connection to be *genealogical*, but he concedes that some kind of similarity might suffice. Accordingly, we focus here on showing that Bonaventure's argument bears important connections and/or similarities to other 'ontological' arguments.

Most importantly, we note that like Anselm in *Proslogion* II, Bonaventure attempts to infer God's existence from the fact that God is an object of human thought. Whilst not all ontological arguments proceed in this fashion, we take this to be a distinctive feature of Anselm's approach which is shared with some other historical ontological arguments (e.g., Descartes' argument in his *Fifth Meditation*). Crucially for our discussion here, because Bonaventure's argument moves from our ability to think of God to God's existence, it is potentially vulnerable to both of Aquinas' objections canvassed above.

Admittedly, as Ian Logan observes, Bonaventure's discussion 'represents a step beyond Anselm' (Logan, 2009, p. 136). Firstly, Bonaventure defines God in terms of 'Being' rather than as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. This consideration is hardly decisive, though, because most modern and historical arguments rely on alternative characterizations of God. Secondly, Bonaventure does not follow Anselm in presenting his argument in *Journey* V as a *reductio ad absurdum*, although again this form is not espoused by most ontological arguments after Anselm's own.

However, when we compare Bonaventure's argument here to his broader *corpus*, it becomes plausible that Bonaventure is relying on a form of reasoning typically endorsed by proponents of ontological arguments: the attempt to show that once one is acquainted with some characterization of God or God's nature, one can come to know that God exists. In Chapter V of the *Journey*, having already considered how one can come to know God through both the external perception of creatures (Chapters I and II) and the interior perception of one's mind (Chapters III and IV), Bonaventure is explicitly seeking knowledge of God which comes through 'looking to the First Principle' (*Journey* I.2; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 6)– that is, by directly considering God's nature as 'Being Itself, declaring that the first name of God is *He Who is*'. (*Journey* V.2; Bonaventure, 28). So, when Bonaventure invites his reader to 'see that Being Itself is so absolutely certain that it cannot be thought not to be' (*Journey* V.3; Bonaventure, 1993, 28–9), he makes this invitation on the basis of the reader's understanding of 'Being Itself'.

The order of discussion in the *Journey* therefore echoes Bonaventure's argument that God's existence is an indubitable truth in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q.1, a.1. There, once he has that all creatures proclaim God's existence, because (*inter alia*) 'qualified being can neither exist nor be understood unless it

[exists and] is understood through unqualified being' (*Disputed* Questions q. 1, a.1, n.15; Bonaventure, 1979, p. 110), Bonaventure next offers a series of reflections on God's nature which show that God's existence is 'a truth so certain that it cannot be thought not to be' (*Disputed* Questions q. 1, a.1, n.20; Bonaventure, 1979, p. 112). To this end, Bonaventure explicitly restates what he takes to be Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* 3 that God cannot be conceived not to exist. Additionally, he develops what is clearly another ontological argument for the indubitability of God's existence (perhaps anticipating Descartes' *Fifth Meditation*), based on his identification of God with Being:

> '"No proposition can be more true than that sort in which something is predicated of itself." But when I say that God exists, the existence predicated of God is totally identical with God, because God is His very existence. Therefore, nothing is more true or more evident than that proposition in which the existence of God is affirmed. Therefore no one can [rationally] think that it is false or be in doubt about it.' (*Disputed* Questions q. 1, a.1, n.28; Bonaventure, 1979, p. 113).

We think that Bonaventure likely has something like this last argument in mind in *Journey* V, which enables him to move from (5) to (6)– i.e., from the fact that knowledge of God *qua* Being is fundamental for human knowledge to the affirmation that God exists. In other words, what we find particularly interesting about *Journey* V is Bonaventure's implicit combination of his argument that divine Being is the first object of the intellect with his ontological argument for the indubitability of God's existence. As such, Bonaventure's argument is at least *in part* 'ontological'– indeed, we take it that what makes his argument especially interesting is the way in which Bonaventure uses his epistemology of being to support his ontological argument.

The *Journey's* argument and Aquinas' first objection

Now that we have outlined Bonaventure's ontological argument in Chapter V of the *Journey*, we can begin to see why Aquinas' first objection to the ontological argument need not apply to it. Some commentators (Gilson, 1938; Klocker, 1978) suggest that Bonaventure's argument is dependent on his preferred epistemology of 'divine illumination', according to which God's being is the first object of the human intellect, functioning as a 'horizon' against which all other objects are judged to be true or real. For present purposes, the important point is that on Bonaventure's account, knowledge of God is innate to humans. Thus, Gilson suggests that according to Bonaventure,

> '[Our idea of God] is not an analogical construction of our intellect, it is innate; we do not discover the concept, we discover it; and if it is not our activity that is its origin, we must know whence it comes, we must explain it by a cause. Thus St Bonaventure dares to maintain that the simplest explanation of our idea of God is God. An idea which comes neither from things nor from ourselves can

> come from none other than God; […] it is therefore eminently qualified to attest irrefutably the existence of its object.' (Gilson, 1938, p. 137).

Notice that if Bonaventure's argument depends on the claim that our knowledge of God is innate, then Aquinas is quite correct to reject it, since Thomas himself believes that we come to understand some of God's nature and existence through reflection on the created world. Since according to both Aquinas and Bonaventure, God is completely simple so that there is no distinction between his being/existence and essence,[12] if Bonaventure means to say that humans presently understand 'Being' this might further intimate that we enjoy exhaustive knowledge of God's essence. Of course, this is precisely Aquinas' first worry about ontological arguments as articulated above.

Yet in our judgment, whilst Bonaventure was committed to an illuminationist epistemology, his argument does not obviously depend on that position. As Brendan Case (2012) notes, Thomists grant that one can form, via abstraction from empirical experience of creatures, the concept of '*esse commune*'– i.e., the being which is (analogously) common to created objects. However, perhaps when one comes to understand being in this way, one at the same time– at least, implicitly– forms an imperfect concept of God's own being as the limit case of created being, which forms the paradigm instance of being.

Recall the 'properties of being' according to Bonaventure: in his view, something exists insofar as it is 'one, true and good' (*Journey* III.3; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 19). Moreover, Bonaventure suggests that being or beings can be complete or incomplete, imperfect or perfect, existing as a part or a whole, as existing through something else or existing per se, and so on. Now someone who has abstracted the concept of *esse commune* can agree with Bonaventure that something exists insofar as it has unity, truth and goodness, and insofar as it is complete, perfect, whole and independent (etc.). As such, they may agree that the abstracted concept of 'common being' entails the possibility of a 'being' without the imperfections of incompleteness, imperfection, disunity or dependence. Perhaps we even judge that something is a being by observing the degree to which it possesses unity, perfection (etc.), measuring it against a dimly imagined standard of 'pure Being'. But this need not mean that we have any clear or distinct understanding of what it means to exist without imperfections, or of the nature of pure Being.

Perhaps a comparison will help. On the Aristotelian epistemology preferred by Aquinas, one comes to know what a triangle is by abstracting the concept from the observation of real-world (albeit, imperfect) shapes we characterize as triangular. But even someone who cannot understand the real definition of 'triangle' (i.e., a three-sided polygon that consists of three edges and three vertices) can nonetheless form some idea of what triangles are. Plausibly, such an imperfect concept will have reference to a *perfect* triangle– for instance, one might form the judgement that a true

[12] See Aquinas, *Summa* Theologiae I.3.4. Bonaventure does not affirm the distinction between essence and existence (and its absence in God) as clearly as Aquinas, but see Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences* I, d. 8, p. 2, q. 2.: 'nothing [sc. besides God] is its own being, just as light is not its own illumination' (Bonaventure, 1882-1902, Vol. 1, 168).

triangle has internal angles of precisely 180 degrees, and that entities are triangular insofar as they resemble such a shape, even if one can only hazily imagine it. So perhaps on the Aristotelian position, one can argue that in some sense one can only know that some objects fall under a concept because they resemble a perfect instance of that concept, even if one cannot understand precisely what such an instance 'looks like' or provide a real definition of an object which perfectly instantiates that concept.

The nineteenth century editors of Bonaventure's *Opera Omnia*, apparently worried that his account of our knowledge of being in the *Journey* might be condemned by Catholics for 'ontologism' (i.e., believing that God's 'being' can be known in this life through immediate intuition), read Bonaventure in a related but subtly different way. They suggest that Bonaventure holds that the being through which we know all other forms of being and non-being is not God's own being, but rather an abstract concept of being which is analogously common to God and creatures:

> 'This analogous being, which is the first [object] known by the apprehending intellect, is not without the slightest shade of divine being… because of its universality, primitiveness and simplicity it is suitable for the contemplative eye to become a mirror for the contemplation of divine [being].' (Bonaventure, 1882-1902, Vol. 5, 316).

As Case (2021) argues, this arguably misrepresents Bonaventure's argument, since for the Seraphic Doctor, 'the being which we are considering is the Divine Being' (*Journey* V.3; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 29). For Bonaventure, on Case's interpretation, we really do have a priori knowledge of pure Being, even though we do not or perhaps cannot directly perceive divine being so as to arrive at clear conceptual knowledge of the latter. But for present purposes, our point is simply that one could affirm Bonaventure's argument (or something close to it) without adopting his illuminationist epistemology.

Of course, it should also be noted that Bonaventure himself did not claim that one could immediately intuit God's essence in this life, at least without special grace. As the editors of the Quarrachi edition note (Bonaventure, 1882-1902, Vol. 5, 315) he elsewhere suggests that 'if some authorities are found, who say that God is presently seen and discerned by humans, they should not be understood [as stating] that He is seen in His essence, but that He is known in some inferior effect' (*Commentary on the Sentences* II, d. 23, a. 2, q. 3; Bonaventure 1882-1902, Vol. 2, 544). Indeed, even angels know God through His visible effects, through spiritual substances, and 'through the influence of the light of the connatural power of the knower, which is the likeness of the same thing, and which [whilst] not abstracted, but infused, [is] inferior to God' *Commentary on the Sentences* II, d. 3, a. 2, q. 2; Bonaventure 1882-1902, Vol. 2, 123).

For this reason, the final chapter of the *Journey*, Bonaventure states that those seeking God must pass over all other ways of knowing God, including its vision of God 'above itself through the *similitude* of the divine Light shining above us and in the divine Light itself *in so far as its is possible in our state as wayfarer*' to a mystical experience of God which is not conceptually mediated and can be attained only

through grace (Bonaventure, 1993, p. 37).[13] In short, then, Bonaventure's argument which we are exploring neither relies on his illumination epistemology nor assumes that we have a comprehensive knowledge of God's essence.

The *Journey's* argument and Aquinas' second objection

Nonetheless, Bonaventure's argument in Chapter V of the *Journey* might, like his other ontological arguments for God's existence, appear vulnerable to Aquinas' second objection: that it provides sceptics no reason to affirm the extra-mental existence of God. That is, one could argue that even if Bonaventure is right that one must conceive of (divine) Being Itself to have knowledge of other beings, perhaps the concept of Being Itself has no referent. While we need to employ the concept of divine Being to perfectly comprehend other beings, pure Being might not exist. If so, Being Itself is a useful concept that enables us to categorize that which possess potency in being and non-being. But Bonaventure has given us no reason to think that is anything more than a fiction.

Unfortunately, Bonaventure does not explicitly address this objection. However, commentators have suggested various replies on his behalf. As hinted above, one response suggests that according to Bonaventure's illuminationist epistemology, one can only make certain judgements because God Himself, as the standard of truth, is present to one's mind (Gilson, 1938; Klocker, 1978). As Isaac Goff writes,

> 'Bonaventure holds that in order for the human mind to recognize this quality [i.e., certainty] of a proposition, it must receive assistance from the objective standard of all truth. This standard must illumine the intellect such that it can recognize the objective quality of the proposition and so warrant the intellect's firm adherence. This is not to deny that one can have subjective certitude about a false proposition, but this misjudgment is not the failure of illumination, but of the judge.' (Goff, 2015, 81).

Of course, for Bonaventure, the 'objective standard of all truth' is pure Being, which enables cognition of all other entities *qua* beings. Bonaventure is clear that the presence or assistance of God in the mind does not merely involve the minds possession the concept of divine being, but also God's external action on the mind: 'The [certain] understanding which is the root of scientific reasoning comes partly from the structure of our nature, i.e., from an internal light; partly from repeated experience as from an exterior light, and partly from the illumination of an eternal light, as from a superior light' (Klocker, 1978, p. 211).

Accordingly, since the knowledge and existence of this standard is grounded in something external to the human mind (i.e., God), then on Bonaventure's account,

[13] Indeed, perhaps one cannot even have (imperfect) conceptual knowledge of God in this life. Thus Bonaventure notes in, 'just as the eye, intent on the various differences of color, does not see the light through which it sees other things, or if it does see, does not notice it, so our mind's eye intent on particular and universal being, does not notice that Being which is beyond all categories, even though it comes first to the mind, and through it, all other things' (*Journey* V.4; Bonaventure, 1993, p. 29).

one cannot come to know being without the extra-mental existence of divine being. As Klocker puts it, 'In St. Bonaventure, there is no illicit transfer from the idea to the thing. It is the presence of God in the soul which makes knowledge possible. The idea of God is not one abstract from sensible things, but is God Himself existing in us' (Klocker, 1978, p. 221).

Unfortunately, we think that this response to Aquinas' criticism is unhelpful. Firstly, it assumes an epistemology which even many Scholastics, including Thomas, reject. Even if one could defend Bonaventure's theory of illumination– a daunting task– that theory would make Bonaventure's argument in Chapter V of the *Journey* dialectically superfluous. If one can show that our ability to know all and any truths hinges on divine illumination, Bonaventure's ontological arguments for theism will be at most secondary considerations.

Another response which Bonaventure could give to Aquinas would be to maintain that, as a general principle, universals have extra-mental existence. Traditionally, Bonaventure has typically been interpreted as a Platonist, who believes that universals exist as 'forms', apart from concrete objects. Recently, Franziska van Buren (2021) has argued that whilst this is somewhat misleading, because Bonaventure's position offers a unique interpretation of Aristotle, Bonaventure nevertheless believed that 'forms exist (*esse*) regardless of whether or not they have spatio-temporal existence (*existere*)' (van Buren, 2021, p. 201). Thus, there is a sense in which dodos exist even now– and indeed, that they existed at the beginning of the universe– insofar as their forms necessarily exist (van Buren, Ibid.). Given this background metaphysical commitment, it seems that Bonaventure is entitled to hold that if 'pure Being' is a universal form (vel sim.), then it has extra-mental existence. Since Bonaventure takes the forms to include fundamental kinds of thing, it seems right to think of pure Being as something like a form. However, as observed above, Bonaventure affirms a strong doctrine of divine simplicity (see *Commentary on the Sentences* I, d.8, p. 2; Bonaventure, 1882-1902, 165–169). On his account, if God's nature or essence exists, God exists. So, as far as Bonaventure is concerned, if God's 'form' exists, then God exists. In short, then, Bonaventure's account of universals may provide a way for him to argue that his argument in Chapter V of the *Journey* provides reason to hold that divine being has extra-mental existence. This approach would mean that his argument does not 'beg the question', although naturally those who reject Bonaventure's account of universals need not be persuaded.

Our final potential response to Aquinas' second objection, therefore, tries to avoid commitment to either Bonaventure's illuminationist epistemology or his quasi-Platonist metaphysics. This response draws on Bonaventure's suggestion that our awareness of divine Being underpins our broader knowledge of being and non-being. In our view, this provides a highly distinctive response to the charge that classical ontological arguments are question-begging, which indicates the particular significance of Bonaventure's argumentative approach in *Journey* V.

In a nutshell, we suggest that if Bonaventure is right that knowledge of being depends on the *concept* of pure Being, this is best explained by the fact that being is *metaphysically* dependent on pure Being. As Bonaventure puts it in *Journey* V.3:

> 'Just as, therefore, complete nothingness contains nothing of being or of its attributes, so contrariwise, being itself contains nothing on non-being, either in act or in potency, *in objective truth* or in our estimation of it.' (Bonaventure, 1993, p. 29).

We think that several considerations may support this judgement. First, one can perhaps mount an argument from the presupposition that human experience is not misleading. That is, it would be awkward if all human knowledge (of being, at least) was dependent on possessing the concept of Pure Being, and yet, Pure Being didn't exist. Is it really the case that our knowledge of being relies on a 'false'[14] (i.e., necessarily uninstantiated) concept, or rather does our knowledge of being rely on a 'true' (i.e., potentially or actually instantiated) concept? We can postulate the two theories as follows:

> False Concept Hypothesis (FCH): Our knowledge rests on a 'false' concept.

> True Concept Hypothesis (TCH): Our knowledges rests on a 'true' concept.

TCH is less awkward and thus a more aesthetically pleasing hypothesis. A hypothesis that possesses more aesthetic virtues than its counterparts has explanatory advantages (see e.g., Sijuwade, 2024, p. 55). While this doesn't give us a demonstrative response to the aforementioned objection, we think this warrants taking into consideration.

Additionally, we note that if prominent forms of atheism are true, it is surprising that there is even a *conceptual* analogy of being (i.e., that all beings are properly understood in relation to the concept 'pure Being'). Given naturalism, for instance, there's no obvious reason to expect that there should be any transcendental property of 'being' at all; let alone a transcendental property which is analogously common to all entities. This latter point holds whether being is an extra-mental property or merely something like a Kantian category which our minds impose upon objects. Moreover, even assuming that atheism is true, and all beings are related by analogy, there is no obvious reason to expect that all beings would be analogously related to divine being (i.e., a being which is perfectly complete, unified and independent).

But Bonaventure would be the first to argue that if theism– or at least, classical theism– is true, then we should expect that non-being and being can only be understood with reference to pure Being. For Bonaventure, metaphysics properly consists in the study of *exemplar causation* (Cullen, 2006, 72–3). That is, for Bonaventure, all creatures resemble God because God creates in line with His divine ideas. In his view, the latter just consist of ways in which creatures can resemble God (see Vater, 2022, Chapter I). In other words, if the perfect God makes us (and in some sense, all creation) 'after His image and likeness', then the conceptual dependence of all beings on pure Being does not appear so surprising. In sum, if Bonaventure is correct that 'pure Being' is the concept through which all other forms of being are known, then this makes it more probable that 'pure Being' has a referent. This affords an unusual

[14] Analytic readers might object that strictly, only propositions are false. Nonetheless, concepts are made up of propositions, so we think that the phrase 'false concept' isn't inappropriate.

way for advocates of classical ontological arguments to deny that the latter 'beg the question'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what are we to make of Bonaventure's argument in Chapter V of the *Journey*? In our view, despite his best efforts, Bonaventure does not demonstrate that God's existence is clearly 'indubitable'. His approach to arguing for theism depends on controversial commitments in epistemology and metaphysics which, although perhaps defensible, will be rejected by many modern audiences.

However, Bonaventure's argument also possesses distinctive appeal. Rather than simply supplying a nominal definition of God at the outset (contrast *Proslogion* II), Bonaventure begins his argument by contending that the concept 'pure Being' underpins our broader knowledge of being and non-being. Nonetheless, Bonaventure is explicit that our understanding of divine Being is not exhaustive. In this way, Bonaventure avoids the Thomist concern that ontological arguments require that we know the essence of God. Similarly, we showed that Bonaventure may have some reasons for thinking that our fundamental concept of divine Being has an actual referent which may be acceptable to skeptics. The most interesting of these also hinges on his epistemology of being. Accordingly, we think we have given Thomists and contemporary analytic philosophers reason to further examine the merits of Bonaventure's ontological argument.

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